



Kansas State University Libraries  
**New Prairie Press**

---

Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal

2018 - Waterways (Larry Patton, editor)

---

## Culture: People to Water

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sfh>

---

### Recommended Citation

(2018). "Culture: People to Water," *Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*. <https://newprairiepress.org/sfh/2018/culture/1>

To order hard copies of the Field Journals, go to [shop.symphonyintheflinthills.org](http://shop.symphonyintheflinthills.org).

The Field Journals are made possible in part with funding from the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation.

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).





## CULTURE

*Gaxá khéji basku angolinbe. We Lived along the River.*

— Kanza Indians

*There has been a great many changes since I came here in the year 1862. All of the streams were so clear that fish could be seen several feet under water and there were worlds of fish in all the streams. The beds of the streams were rock, gravel or clay. The entire country being covered with a heavy growth of bluestem grass, there was very little dirt washed into the streams, but since the country has been settled and much of the land plowed, the pools in the small streams have been filled and the river is filling very fast so there is little room left for the fish.*

— E. T. Wickersham, *Fall River Star*, 23 February 1934

### OPPOSITE PAGE

*People of the Wind II (detail)*

Shin-hee Chin



## PEOPLE TO WATER

The great inland ocean had long since receded when the first peoples gazed across the Sea of Grass. For thousands of years, they lived along clear streams full of water and fish. But the precious resource drew waves of new inhabitants who lacked the epoch cultural ties to the grassland. They were American farmers who measured virtue by the cultivated acre. As they displaced the native prairie peoples and applied land practices adapted to their European homelands, the landscape was thrust into culture shock. They plowed fields, dug wells, dammed creeks, and erected mills. Only drought and the remains of a rocky sea floor could stop the plow's march. And so, in times of drought they learned, nearly too late, that the resilient prairie that once sustained the mighty bison could sustain them too. Water is life, and water runs deep in the roots of what's left of the tallgrass prairie.



*People of the Wind I (detail)*  
Shin-hee Chin